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ABSTRACT

This document describes an online/hybrid course at Mt. San Antonio College (MSAC) (California) that gives faculty the experience of being a student in an online class. The course is 6 weeks long and the participating faculty members meet on campus only 3 times; the rest of the course work is conducted in an online mode. Each week's learning module and class activities are directed toward a central theme, such as online teaching or best practices. The course has been offered twice--once in the 2001 fall term with 13 faculty participants, and once in the 2002 spring term with 16 faculty participants. Faculty were taught how to use computers, browse the course Web site, and post a message to the class discussion forum. The courses culminated in student presentations. It appeared that participants had little trouble attending the three on-campus meetings, and that they found the coursework offered them much more insight into online learning from the student perspective. In addition, the hybrid nature added to the overall "connectedness" of the courses--faculty became well acquainted with each other after 6 weeks. The paper concludes by recommending implementing another hybrid course for faculty at MSAC that focuses on the selection, creation, and design of a new online course. (EMH)

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Online Instructors Must Be Online Students First

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Many instructors who are considering online learning for course delivery often ask the question, "What exactly is the difference between teaching in the classroom and teaching online?" The answer to that question is not a simple answer. It is obvious that one difference between the two modalities is the delivery and accessibility of course materials over the Internet or Web versus delivery face-to-face in a classroom. Students who enroll in online classes must have, at the minimum, the hardware, software, and connection requirements in order to access course information from a distance. It should be obvious then, that instructors must have similar if not better access to the Web too, in order to teach online courses. In order for students to be able to navigate a course web site and interact with classmates and the instructor, it is extremely helpful if they have experience with web browsing and communication tools. Students have come to expect that instructors are the font of information for course content and skills. To live up to this expectation, instructors must acquire the knowledge and skills regarding online learning through some experience of their own. Knowledge of online skills can be learned through workshops, books, and hands-on learning. The way in which students learn most effectively in an online environment, (and therefore

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how to teach in that mode), is best learned through first hand experience in a well-designed online class.

Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California, has recently developed an online/hybrid course for its faculty, so that instructors can experience what it is like to be a student in an online class. This new course for faculty, called "*Introduction to Online Learning*," is a 6-week hybrid course, where the participants meet on-campus three times during the course, and the rest of the course work is conducted in an online mode. "*Introduction to Online Learning*" at Mt. SAC was designed around a systematic pedagogical pathway, similar to Riverside Community College's ICARE (Introduction, Connect, Apply, Reflect, Evaluate), 4faculty.org's DREAM (Discover, Read, Explore, Apply, Measure) and Contra Costa's FAST (Foundation, Application, Sharing, Test) Online Academy. This course uses the TEACH acronym, for Think, Explore, Apply, Check, and Help, which is reflected in each learning module. Each week's learning module and class activities are directed toward a central theme:

Week 1 – Current Status of Online Learning
Week 2 – Online Teaching and Learning
Week 3 – Campus Resources for Online Learning
Week 4 – Creating Online Courses and Components
Week 5 – Working with Students in an Online Mode
Week 6 – Best Practices in Online Learning

The course utilizes two different books, "Teaching Online: A Practical Guide" by Susan Ko and Steve Rossen (from Houghton-Mifflin),

and "Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom – the Realities of Online Teaching" by Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (from Jossey-Bass). Faculty participants in the course were given the two textbooks, provide free of charge by the College. Participants in the first course offering told us how much they enjoyed the knowledge and resources presented in these two books. Future participants in the course will be able to check out these books from the Mt. SAC library during the course, or purchase the books themselves.

Course activities involve Web research on accepted learning theories, examining current online or hybrid courses at Mt. SAC, discovering faculty resources for creation of online components for enhancing regular on-campus as well as online or hybrid courses, exploring several course management systems, evaluating course design for effectiveness, building learning communities through discussion forum postings, and a group presentation. The second on-campus meeting of the course is a chance for participants to ask questions, give feedback on the course, and have more hands-on time with instructors nearby. The third campus meeting is at the end of the course, and involves group presentations, final comments and suggestions regarding the course, and celebration of successful completion of the course.

The first offering of this course in Fall 2001 included 13 faculty members as "students," and 2 instructors – these authors. The course started with an on-campus meeting where students were given information

on the course format, the instructor expectations of time commitment and student involvement, the technical requirements, the books to be used, and the proposed course activities. Two of the participants promptly decided that they did not have the time to devote to the course at that time. The remaining students stayed for a hand-on session with computers, a tour through the course web site, and a first attempt at posting a message to the class discussion forum.

In the middle of the first course offering, the instructors took some video clips of faculty participants and their responses to two questions – "What are your impressions of this course?" and "What in particular have you learned about online teaching and learning?" These video clips show some of the course participants describing some of the differences between online learning and classroom teaching. These video clips may be accessed at http://elearn.mtsac.edu/facprep/interviews.htm. Access may be made through either a slow or fact connection.

The thirteen faculty participants completed the course with much more insight into online learning from the student perspective. One participant shared their learning in the course; "a successful online teacher is one who can create a supportive learning environment for students by demonstrating a sincere concern for student success. Students will feel comfortable in a learning setting where the instructor promotes a reflective environment through which students can apply what is being learned. The online instructor must demonstrate willingness for flexibility, and be open

to the collaborative approach to learning. In addition, the instructor must learn to value the luxury of time in an asynchronous environment where students are allowed ample time to read, explore, reflect, and respond to issues addressed in the course."

In the second course offering in Spring 2002, there were sixteen faculty participants. Again, two "students" immediately dropped when faced with the rigor of the course, and the time commitment required for successful completion of the course. The rest of the students completed the six weeks of online and on-campus activities, and presented some wonderful ideas to the class during the last campus meeting. Some of these ideas will be carried on by the faculty participants after the class is over, and will benefit the entire campus community. The benefits of faculty involvement in an online learning course are multifold.

The hybrid nature of "*Introduction to Online Learning*" (3 on-campus meetings in addition to online activities) seemed to add to the overall "connectedness" of the course. Participants had little trouble attending the three required on-campus meetings. Since the second meeting was conducted only three weeks after the start of the course, even slower beginners were able to get their questions answered and skills up-to-speed to be able to contribute to the overall learning in the course. By the time the final meeting day arrived, participants in the class were well acquainted through online discussions that had been posted during the class.

The authors would like to extend the online learning experience for faculty at Mt. SAC to include at least another hybrid course which focuses primarily on the selection, creation, and design of a new online or hybrid course in a faculty member's discipline. This new course would take the faculty participant through the actual steps of converting and adapting a regular on-campus course to an effective online or hybrid course. Course learning modules would include developing student-centered, inquiry-based, and outcomes-based learning objectives to direct student learning in an online mode. Other learning modules would be the redesign of existing course materials used for regular classes, and adapting them appropriately for online students. Additional learning modules would include the effective use of interactive tools, and incorporating a variety of learning styles and tools for student learning in the online mode.